

Correspondence Engine and Notification (CEN)

Request for Information (RFI) VA118-15-N-0639

Questions and Answers (Q&As)

- 1) Is it required that the proposed cloud solution have an active ATO with a federal agency for FedRAMP?

As correspondence will contain PII and PHI, the VBA will not require hosting and/or cloud based services for correspondence documents (PDFs). CEN will be housed behind the VA firewall.

- 2) Will CEN require hosting and cloud services?

As correspondence will contain PII and PHI, the VBA will not require hosting and/or cloud based services for correspondence documents (PDFs). CEN will be housed behind the VA firewall.

- 3) CEN requirement 2.2 - The system shall require the VSR to authenticate to the web page using an authentication system that is compliant with the security requirements in VA Handbook 6500. *We would like to review the VA Handbook 6500 to understand this security requirement. Please provide a copy of this specification.*

VA Handbook 6500 provided as Attachment

- 4) CEN requirement 3.7 - retrieve the document(s) from the VBMS eFolder using the existing services as detailed in the "eDocument Service specification" for the fetchdocumentbyID method. *We would like to review the "eDocument Service specification" to confirm our understanding of this requirement. Please provide a copy of this specification.*

Attachment provided

- 5) CEN requirement 3.5- The system shall also use the file number to retrieve (via a transactional web service connecting to the VBA Corporate Database via the Benefits Gateway Services team) the Legacy_POA_CD, POA name, ORG_TYPE_NM for the recipient's POA. *Will the transactional web service be a standard web service API? Please provide documentation or us to review and confirm our understanding of the web service. Also, we would like to review the relevant specs related to the VBMS. Please provide a copy of this specification.*

Attachment provided

- 6) CEN requirement 3.5.3 -The system shall display all three values. *What are the 3 values that we must display to satisfy this requirement?*

- Legacy_POA_CD
- POA name
- ORG_TYPE_NM

- 7) CEN requirement 6.2.4.2 - The system shall write a message to the VBA Corporate Database MAP-D notes using a BGS web service stating that a text notification for the Recipient to check the viewer was sent. This note shall contain at a minimum the mobile phone number sent to, the document ID, the document type, the correspondence recipient name and the file number. *We would like the specification relevant to the VBA Corporate Database MAP-D notes. Please provide a copy of this specification.*

Attachment provided

- 8) CEN requirement 6.2.5.1 - The system shall send a SMS message with a six digit passcode randomly generated for this specific transaction to correspondence recipient's cell phone, or the system shall use a 3rd party industry standard authentication API such as Google Authenticator delivered to a confirmed device. *Is the confirmed device stored in the contact profile? Is the confirmed device stored internally or using MS Dynamics*

To clarify, please use "confirmed mobile phone number" in place of confirmed device. We do not expect to save individual device information in our databases, only confirmed mobile numbers.

- 9) Within the pilot phase, the system shall support a minimum of 500 concurrent users. *Are the concurrent users comprised of VSRs or veterans accessing the portal?*

The concurrent users are VSRs (e.g. VBA employees). Only the CEN viewer (rolled out in phase 3) will be accessible by Veterans.

- 10) By the nationwide rollout phase for disability compensation, the system shall support a minimum of 15,000 concurrent users. *Are the concurrent users comprised of VSRs or veterans accessing the portal?*

If by "nationwide rollout" you are referring to the nationwide rollout in Phase 2 of the CEN tool that allows correspondence to be sent, the 15,000 concurrent users should be considered to be comprised of VSRs (e.g. VBA employees).

- 11) Are correspondences pre-written and uploaded by a system user or generated on request based on a specific veteran's data?

Correspondences are pre-written and already in PDF format. On-demand generation of correspondence is not part of this requirement, merely delivery of correspondence already generated.

12) Rather than encrypting emails, would we be able to place encrypted data in an attachment and encrypt that?

As long as correspondence recipients (e.g. Veterans) can open the encrypted document using commonly available software and the encryption is secure, VBA has no issues with the approach.

13) It was mentioned during the Virtual industry day that a Veteran may opt in by sending a particular type of text message. This would then generate an email to them, prompting them to go to a preferences page where they may then opt in. Is this correct?

Correct, VBA will require Veterans to double-authenticate their identity (using phone and email address on record). Enrollment letters will contain a unique code which Veterans will text to a specified number in order to initiate the enrollment process. After texting their unique code, the Veteran will receive a text response notifying them that they will receive an email from VA within 24 hours. A no-reply mailbox will then generate an email and send it to the Veteran. This email will house a hyperlink which will redirect the Veteran to an external facing webpage where they can opt-into the CEN pilot, input their correspondence preferences, and confirm their telephone number and email address.

Clicking on a link, or scanning a QR code. Question: Would this bring them right to the preferences page where they can choose to opt in, therefore skipping the email notification mentioned above, or is there a different flow here?

- Scanning the QR Code will bring the Veteran directly to the CEN preference page. After the Veteran selects their correspondence preferences they will be prompted to authenticate both their email address and mobile phone number.
- Utilizing the hyperlink requires the Veteran to input the unique code provided in the enrollment letter in order to reach the CEN preference page. After the Veteran selects their correspondence preferences they will be prompted to authenticate both their email address and mobile phone number.

14) If the user chooses to receive a correspondence as a (PDF?) email attachment, or to read it electronically via their eFolder, would it be beneficial to have that correspondence be password protected or encrypted first?

As long as correspondence recipients (e.g. Veterans) can open the encrypted document using commonly available software and the encryption is secure, VBA has no issues with the approach.

15) It was mentioned that correspondences are often composed of multiple documents and attachments.

- Are those already generated AND merged, or is it one of the use cases to be able to select multiple documents and merge them into a correspondence, along with certain attachments?

Correspondence is composed of multiple documents (these documents are generated in the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) and attachments (i.e. VA forms). Attachments will be housed in the internal CEN tool while documents will be pulled from VBMS. After compiling these documents and attachments, the internal CEN tool will merge these documents into a single PDF.

- Would each document then need to be requested separately using the appropriate File Number and Document ID combination and then merged or would a single such combination bring up all the documents and attachments needed in a correspondence?

The CEN tool must allow VA users to pull multiple documents from within a single file number at one time and add attachments as needed (File Numbers are a unique string of digits which identifies a specific Veteran while the Document ID is a unique string of digits which identifies a specific document within VBMS). VA users will only input one File Number at a time however they can input several document IDs correlated to a single File Number.

16) Is it ok to assume that finished correspondence should be in PDF format?

Yes, correspondence should be formatted as a PDF.

17) Are the following portals up to the vendor to create or are they already built and we just need to tie into them?

- The portal where a VA employee would login, provide the File number and Document ID, and queue the correspondence for distribution based on the veteran preference.

This is the internal CEN tool and yes, the Vendor is responsible for developing this application.

- The portal where a Veteran would set their preferences to opt in/out

This is expected to be an external facing webpage and yes the vendor will be responsible for development.

- The web viewer for Veterans to view their correspondences

Yes, the CEN viewer which will be accessed by Veterans will be developed by the vendor.

18) It is mentioned that you would like cover pages generated. Would the vendor's solution therefore need to have a template in place and populate it with the correspondence's information? So this would be an example of a part of the correspondence that is not already generated by the existing systems?

Yes, this is part of the correspondence that is not already generated by existing systems. Cover pages are strictly for address related issues:

- Aligning address information with the window in standardized envelopes that are utilized at the centralized printing facility.
- Inputting an alternate address for correspondence.

19) In the CEN user base requirements, there is no information regarding the amount of concurrent users (Veterans) that can access the CEN viewer at one time. Has VBA identified the amount of users they want to be able to access the CEN viewer at one time? Also in which phase is the Veteran facing viewer expected to be deployed?

- We have not yet been able to accurately estimate the total number of Veterans that will opt into electronic correspondence so we have not yet been able to gauge the maximum number of users that should be able to access the CEN viewer at one time. VBA does have millions of registered Veterans that use eBenefits and/or the Stakeholder Enterprise Portal (SEP) so we expect a substantial subset of the Veteran population will opt into electronic correspondence.
- It is anticipated that Phases 3 and 4 of the CEN project will pilot the CEN viewer to the Veteran. VBA currently envisions carrying out a review of deliverables for each current phase prior to deciding whether to move forward with each subsequent phase (i.e. a review of the deliverables from phase 1 will occur prior to the start of phase 2). The success of deliverables such as the centralized print interface and deployment will aid VBA in deciding whether or not to continue forward with subsequent phases. Please note that this acquisition strategy is not definite at this time, and the input VBA gets from industry in response to this RFI will dictate the acquisition strategy. Any state of the industry ideas with respect to acquisition strategy are encouraged.

20) How does VBA envision incorporating the actual management of central print and outbound mail? Are external vendors permitted to provide services for the actual printing and mailing portion?

VBA must use the Government Publishing Office (GPO) as the first choice for physical print. However, VBA is not legally obligated to go through GPO for electronic notifications so vendors do have an opportunity to provide this service.

21) As the government can require its organizations to send emails from behind an internal firewall, is VBA open to a secure cloud solution for the CEN application?

At this time we do not have a restriction to send email from behind the VA firewall so as long as the email is sent securely we are open to suggestion/recommendations.

22) Please provide context around VBA printing.

VBA receives several million claims a year and we respond to Veterans in various ways. We send a letter notifying the Veteran that we have received their claim, we send the Veteran letters notifying them that VBA requires more information in order to process their claim, and we also send development and award letters. The current process for physical mail has no standardization. The fifty six regional offices use different materials (paper, envelopes, etc.) for print and mailing processes. Centralizing printing operations would allow VBA to save a substantial amount of money and eliminate human error by standardizing both the printing and mailing process.

23) How might the CEN prototype work with other VA systems? Is there an authoritative source of customer data across VA?

As far as Customer Data Integration (CDI) including information such as contact history and phone number, we will call or retrieve this information from VBA databases (to include the Corporate Database). What we are especially seeking is a connection between the CEN tool (the CEN tool will be internal to VA and therefore only accessed by VA users) and the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). The CEN tool should pull metadata from VBMS (Document ID, Document Type, etc.) that will enable the VA user to verify that they are sending the correct correspondence to the correct Veteran at the correct address. Please note that we are prototyping electronic correspondence with a single line of business (LoB) so we are currently keeping the scope small. However, we would like the future enterprise system to send correspondence up to systems owned by the office of Veterans Relationship Management (VRM).

24) Has VBA discussed any kind of communication campaign to incentivize the Veteran to join electronic correspondence?

As electronic correspondence is currently planned as a pilot we have not created a complete communication plan. When an enterprise solution is developed there will be a campaign to drive Veterans to opt-into electronic correspondence. We cannot release a public relations campaign for a pilot.

25) In the requirements for the internal CEN application, the first step for the VA user is to provide a File Number and Document ID. What is the relationship between the File Number and Document ID?

In VBMS, File Numbers are a unique string of digits which identify a specific Veteran while the Document ID is a unique string of digits which identify a specific document

within VBMS. Note that a Veteran's documents are housed in their eFolder which has a File Number associated with it. When the VA user inputs the File Number and Document ID(s), the CEN tool will query VBMS to find the document(s) in the VBMS eFolder and verify that the Document ID(s) are associated with File Number. This ensures that Veterans do not receive the wrong correspondence.

26) Will the CEN solution create letters and documents to be sent to Veterans?

No, VA users will create letters in VBMS. The CEN tool will pull prefabricated documents from VBMS and compile them into a single piece of correspondence (refer to 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 in the CEN requirements document for clarification on the use of the term correspondence in the context of the CEN project) and route it based on the Veteran's preferences (encrypted email, CEN viewer, or physical print).

27) So for the desired solution, the Veteran will access the CEN viewer if they have opted into electronic correspondence and the CEN tool routes their correspondence there?

Yes

28) Is VBA open to utilizing encrypted attachments in email?

Yes, so long as the correspondence is encrypted and secured VBA is open to suggestion.

29) Does VBA want an automated message to notify VA users that letters are ready to be sent after they are generated in VBMS?

We may not necessarily need this functionality for the pilot but it would certainly be coveted for the enterprise solution.

30) Regarding Software as a Service, has VBA identified the FISMA level (moderate or high) that this solution requires? The FISMA level directly effects how you configure your SaaS. If you haven't we would prefer to know prior to the deadline for the RFI response and definitely before the request for proposal (RFP).

The FISMA level for the CEN solution/contract is anticipated to be moderate at this time.

31) Has VBA identified a solution that currently exists that may serve as a reference for the CEN solution?

We don't have a system that we identified that is a complete fit but we did see some systems that offer potential alignment opportunities. However, VBA prefers new and innovative ideas so we will not reference these systems.

32) Are there any other agencies that we can get information for?

Other federal agencies are doing narrow slices of what VBA envisions and most of their solutions are embedded internally.